

## **Putting Research into Practice: Implementing Evidence-Based Practices in Community Corrections**

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is the application of science into operational practice for services and programs for offenders. The goal is to use practices that have been empirically tested and have been shown to reduce recidivism among offenders. Based on numerous studies and meta-analyses of offender rehabilitation programs, researchers have outlined a set of principles to guide the implementation of EBP. The evidence-based principles for effective services and interventions with offenders are:

1. conduct an assessment of offender risk and needs using an actuarial instrument and determine the drivers of criminal behavior
2. enhance intrinsic motivation through use of constructive communication techniques, such as motivational interviewing and goal setting
3. apply risk, need, and responsivity principles (i.e., target high-risk offenders, focus on changing criminogenic factors, provide services that match needs); provide the appropriate dosage of services; and, deliver treatment and other services as part of the sentencing and sanctioning process
4. employ programs and practices grounded in scientific evidence (i.e., cognitive behavioral therapy) and delivered by trained staff
5. utilize community support networks to reinforce pro-social behaviors and help offenders establish prosocial contacts in the community
6. routinely monitor and assess offender and staff performance

## **EBP Protocols in Virginia**

The state of Virginia is committed to the implementation of EBP in both local and state community corrections. To that end, four local pilot sites and four state pilot sites will put into practice the EBP principles. Those sites are Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Williamsburg and Winchester. Following is a description of the approaches to implementation in each locality.

### ***Charlottesville Pilot Site***

The Charlottesville Region is in the process of developing a comprehensive community based approach to pretrial, probation, and parole supervision with three objectives:

1. Protecting public safety;
2. Holding offenders accountable to victims and the community; and,
3. Helping offenders become responsible and productive members of society.

Some of the steps toward change Charlottesville will take include:

- Select standardized or objective assessment tool
- Train staff in Motivational Interviewing
- Develop supervision levels based on risk
- Modify treatment program to involve cognitive behavioral approaches
- Share resources (e.g., develop resource manual)
- Develop time-line (from offenders view)
- Review process for first visit and intake procedures for clients including lobby arrangement and atmosphere and how clients are greeted
- Develop four positive comment/incentive process
- Develop sanctions/incentives (swift/certain)
- Review and rewrite job descriptions to meet EBP standards

### ***Lynchburg Pilot Site***

At Lynchburg Community Corrections, the goal is to increase offender compliance with probation requirements leading to an increase in successful case closures and a reduction in the incidence of recidivism. Implementation of EBP will focus on the following strategies:

1. Evaluate the availability and practicality of utilizing assessment instruments to help determine offender risk and needs.
2. Identify and evaluate the range of local treatment options and develop a screening and assessment method to refer offenders to the most appropriate treatment service.
3. Identify and develop networks with appropriate pro-social community organizations (recreation, faith-based, medical, education and employment, etc.) to assist probationers in making connections that continue beyond the period of supervised probation.

4. Identify staff training needs and provide training opportunities in areas that support EBP such as motivational interviewing, cross-training with local substance abuse and mental health professionals, setting measurable goals, monitoring the stages of change, dealing with non-compliance, cognitive behavioral training and group facilitation skills.

#### Agency Partners

Several state and national agencies, including DCJS, DOC and NIC, will be involved in the implementation process to assist in coordinating the selection of an offender risk assessment tool to be implemented statewide and identifying education and training opportunities. Collaboration Local criminal justice agencies will collaborate in the EBP process, including the CSB, Interfaith Outreach Association, Domestic Violence Programs and a variety of other non-profit and private treatment service agencies.

#### Research and Evaluation

As part of the evaluation effort, Lynchburg will review unsuccessful case closures to determine types of violations; and, identify factors in unsuccessful cases, such as offense type; length of probation ordered/served; areas of non-compliance; criminal history; treatment requirements; participation in treatment services; substance abuse; education and/or employment status and other significant measurable variables. In utilizing pre and post assessments, Lynchburg will be able to assess the extent to which criminogenic factors are being addressed during supervised probation, and what relation they may have to the outcome of the case.

#### ***Williamsburg Pilot Site***

Colonial Community Corrections and Probation & Parole District 34 are working collectively to develop sound principles of EBP to implement in their community. Initially, they will focus on Organizational Development, and work with staff from both organizations to introduce related concepts and components. Williamsburg has introduced staff to the evidence-based principles and focused on the guiding principles of: Deportment, Rewards/Sanctions, and Responsivity. In the near future, the site will introduce and focus on the principles of organizational change, to include assessment, intervention, and monitoring and measurement. They will work with the local Community Criminal Justice Board to facilitate change in the community.

#### ***Winchester Pilot Site***

Collaboration is the initial emphasis in Winchester, where a number of agencies are working together to implement EBP, including Probation & Parole District 11; Clarke/Frederick/Fauquier/Winchester (CFFW) Regional Jail; Division of Court Services; Department of Vocational Rehabilitation; and Department of Social Services. The goal is to reduce recidivism by coordinating efforts addressing offender treatment and supervision. Probation & Parole and the CFFW jail have entered into an agreement to employ a Transitional Specialist responsible for ensuring a treatment continuum that emphasizes comparable cognitive behavioral concepts. In addition, Winchester has formed a new task force spearheaded by the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to find jobs for offenders and support their successful reintegration into the community.